Handi-Lift Advisory Committee May 18, 2011 Minutes

This meeting of the Handi-Lift Advisory Council met at the Hood Building on South President Street.

Attending this meeting were Sam Tensley, General Manager of JATRAN, Karen Robinson (JATRAN), the Rev. Sam Gleese (City of Jackson ADA Coordinator), Traci Brent (City Transit Services Division, JATRAN ADA Coordinator), Jason Bunch, Lee Cole, Kay Hardage, Esq., of Disability Rights Mississippi, Willie Cook, and Dr. Scott M. Crawford (Chair).

The meeting opened at 1:10pm. After brief introductions and signing of the attendance list, Dr. Crawford read the March 16th Minutes. Ms. Brent corrected a typographical error. With that one correction, the minutes were approved unanimously.

Ms. Hardage opened with the announcement of a raffle to benefit Disability Rights Mississippi to take place on June 16th. One need not be there to win. Tickets were \$5 a piece or five for twenty dollars.

Old Business:

The first item was last Monday's (May 16th) meeting of Councilman Chokwe Lumumba's ad hoc committee on transportation (JATRAN). Dr. Crawford noted that no one from the Mayor's office attended and none of the senior staff of JATRAN were in attendance. He asked Mr. Tensley if there was a reason. He explained that "JATRAN is not a part of that committee." He suggested that the chairman call Sean Perkins (Chief of Staff) at the Mayor's Office for a more detailed explanation, as he could not discuss the matter. Dr. Crawford commented that it makes little or no sense to hold a committee to discuss recommendations to improve JATRAN without having JATRAN's senior staff there to participate.

The next item was the scheduling software. Ms. Brent said that the contract with *RouteMatch* was executed on May 6th, and that the City expects to have the software installed in "four to five months" but no later than October 6th, 2011. JATRAN will be given a new server as well as about eight or nine computer stations.

Mr. Knight wrote extensive comments on the Riders' Guide and Policies and Procedures Manual, which were given to the City last week. Ms. Brent confirmed that those revisions will be done within two weeks time.

New Business:

Mr. Knight asked in a phone call last week about changing the scheduling window for Handi-Lift from 14 days in advance to 7 days. Each rider of Handi-Lift present at this meeting had an opportunity to speak, and all said that leaving it at 14 days was best. JATRAN

dispatcher/reservationist Karen Robinson indicated that scheduling at seven days before a needed trip is problematic due to capacity problems. Others agreed with this assessment so the recommendation of this committee was to leave the scheduling window as it is: up to 14 days in advance of the trip.

The Chairman was aware, through Attorney Hardage, that Mr. Thatcher raised the question of whether or not Handi-Lift Run #8 had been reinstated as stated in the City of Jackson's Bi-Annual Report of September 30, 2010. Mr. Tensley explained that the run was returned to the "run pick" in August, and an operator chose it in October. It ran through the month of March, with sporadic service after that based upon the availability of operators and overtime funds. To summarize, Mr. Tensley explained that bus operators choose runs based on seniority, and because there are not enough bus operators to cover all the runs, some may be left unmanned and therefore, out of operation.

Dr. Crawford commented that hiring new operators to cover all the necessary runs as well as having an "extraboard" was included in Mr. Thatcher's recommendations. Crawford added that Paragraph 43 of the Consent Decree clearly states: "The City will design, fund, implement, and operate its paratransit service to satisfy all requests by ADA eligible riders for service, including next-day service requests." The shortage of operators seems to violate this important provision.

Next was a discussion of the Ride-A-Longs from last week's Monitor's visit. Several volunteers from LIFE rode fixed route buses. Dr. Crawford was told that the two wheelchair users had relatively good experiences, showing improvement over last year's rides. However, a person of small stature had to struggle onto and off of various buses because operators did not offer to kneel the bus without being asked. This was true for others with gait impairments (users of walkers for instance). Use of the kneeling function without being asked is something this committee has discussed before, and remains to be an area in need of substantial improvement.

Ms. Cole and Mr. Bunch related an instance of inefficient scheduling and refusing service that took place last month. There was a meeting on April 6th, 2010, at Disability Rights Mississippi. Several ADA Advisory Council members were travelling to the same place at the same time (only a few blocks from the Hood building). For some reason, JATRAN scheduled two buses to bring Ms. Cole and Mr. Bunch, when one would have sufficed. Karen Robinson indicated that it would be best to make a "group reservation" so a bus can be made available in advance. Others in the committee pointed out though that in practice, people are told by dispatchers to "make individual reservations." Mr. Tensley said that they need consistency on that issue.

In addition to the scheduling inefficiency, two others were told they could not ride because they were not on the schedule. The committee members noted that hopefully, these glaring inefficiencies will be minimized with the help of scheduling software, but Ms. Cole asked why bus operators were not given the authority to make real-time decisions on their own (e.g., giving a ride to the other customers headed to the same meeting, since there was plenty of room on the bus). Mr. Tensley said he would look into the matter.

Dr. Crawford brought up a proposal that other transit providers (e.g., Miami) use to divert some trips from paratransit to fixed route. They issue photo ID's to paratransit eligible customers and allow them to use that ID to ride fixed route for free. Obviously, it would not divert all trips, but creating the incentive to ride for free might motivate some people to ride fixed route at least some of the time. Mr. Tensley said that each Handi-Lift trip costs about \$22. Subtracting the \$2 fare, each diverted trip could save the City \$20 (\$40 for each round trip). Ms. Robinson and Ms. Cole commented that they doubted many paratransit users would opt to take fixed route under any circumstances. Ms. Brent said that even if only a minority of people participated, there would be some savings.

Finally, Dr. Crawford asked about the possibility of purchasing/utilizing sedans for some paratransit customers that don't require a lift-equipped vehicle. Mr. Tensley said that finding a place to park the vehicles is an obstacle. Crawford asked why the City has not sold the many out-of-service vehicles sitting on JATRAN's lot. Ms. Brent and Mr. Tensley said that plans were being made earlier that day to sell and get rid of all the old buses. Unfortunately, the revenue from these sales will not be given to JATRAN, but go back into the City's General Fund. Mr. Tensley said that using sedans has not been ruled out as an option to make JATRAN's operations more efficient.

ADA Coordinator Sam Gleese made several announcements. First, Veteran's Cab Company has purchased an accessible van, but is charging a premium of \$10 per one-way trip over and above the regular fare to wheelchair users. The committee members believe this not to be permissible under ADA. Dr. Crawford agreed to look it up and email Ms. Brent and Rev. Gleese as soon as possible.

Second, October will be Employ People with Disabilities Awareness Month. Rev. Gleese wants to arrange a citywide event to call attention to persons with disabilities. Committee members were encouraged to engage their agencies to plan for this event.

Third, this committee's vice-chair, Napoleon Campbell, resigned his position on the committee as well as his position on the ADA Advisory Council. Dr. Crawford opened the floor for nominations to replace Mr. Campbell. There were none at that time, so the issue was tabled for the next meeting in July.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at about 2:40pm.

The next meeting of the Handi-Lift Advisory Council is scheduled for July 20th at 1pm to be held at the Hood Building First Floor Conference Room.

These notes were written by Scott M. Crawford, Ph.D., Chairperson.

These Minutes were approved at the July 20, 2011, meeting.